

ARTS EDUCATION

Our Community Record (from page 1)

A perspective driven by young people

This is Spear's second Howard Chapnik Grant. His first, received in 2000, helped pave the way for the use of photography in Flathead Indian Reservation schools.

Spear had just moved to the Mission Valley with his wife, Jill Erickson, a native of Polson whose family homesteaded there. He was leaving behind a career as a photojournalist and teacher for the International Center of Photography in inner-city schools. He wanted to bring that same approach to his new home.

"I've always been interested in trying to connect young people to photography who might not have access to the medium because of economic or availability issues," he says.

He also believes passionately in the value of young people documenting their own community. "I want to keep the perspective driven by young people. Their perspective is as unique as anyone else's."

Spear launched Our Community Record in 2002 as a means of encouraging students to connect with their community by seeing it afresh through the camera's viewfinder. He now has more than a decade of "really rich" images archived, and applied for the Howard Chapnik Grant to "celebrate the work of these young people with a handsome publication that people can have in their hands and homes."

When the light bulb goes on

Photography can help kids "connect other things that are going on in terms of education and experiences," says Spear. For example, one student forgot to rewind his film before opening the back of his camera and ruined his first roll. "What he learned is that you need to do certain things to make certain things work," says Spear.

Over the course of an hour, other lessons emerge.

Watching two students try to wind film on a reel – one with frustration, and the other with ease – he observes, "You work slowly and you work quickly. Every photographer works differently."

It will happen again in the darkroom. "When they hold the film up, look at a picture and see for themselves where they didn't hold still, where they didn't focus, that stays with them."

It all adds up to a very hands-on approach that gives students a great deal of feedback from their efforts. Spear tells the story of a student who took a camera home to Hot Springs and photographed a creek he often visits with a friend.

"The moment he printed the picture and saw it come out, he said, 'Oh wow!' The light bulb goes on – he's making the connection. It's golden."



David Spear (with Cleo), right, joins some of his seventh grade photography students at Two Eagle River School in Pablo.

Seeing the look in a student's eyes

In 2006, Spear and his wife formed A VOICE (Art, Vision and Outreach in Community Education), a nonprofit organization that helps support his work at Two Eagle River School. In 2008, A VOICE published *Flathead Reservation: All Stops*, a book that combines photographs and writing by Upward Bound students.

Student work has also been displayed at the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Complex in Pablo and the Sandpiper Gallery in Polson and graced calendars printed by S & K Technologies, Inc., a tribally owned company.

Spear says collaborations with teachers and administrators at TERS have been essential to Our Community Record's success. "It's important to find teachers I can work closely with so we can continue to evolve the program," he says. Currently, he's collaborating with middle school teacher Allen Bone and high school art teacher Sean Dalby.

"All of us are looking at the cultural aspect," says Bone, who moved to the reservation six years ago. "We understand that it's very important."

As a teacher, he appreciates the way photography can touch a kid. "It's seeing the look in a student's eyes when a picture rises from the developing tray."

Old school in the digital age

Spear's approach is distinctly old-school. He often starts students off with the most rudimentary forms of photography, helping them discover how light and its absence can form an image. They make a pinhole camera, experiment with large-format cameras, and learn to use a light meter, all before confronting the intricacies of 35mm cameras, with decisions about apertures, film speed and focus, and entering the darkroom.

"It's not the way photography is done in the world anymore," Spear says. "But we're set up for it."

"From a tactile point of view, we're very connected to process," he adds. And from a

practical standpoint, investing in digital cameras, computers and software is simply out of reach. It's the difference between spending \$5,000 a year for film and darkroom supplies, and \$100,000 for the cameras, computers and software it would take to enter the digital age.

"But we're slowly sneaking digital cameras into the mix," he says. Last May 15, seventh graders were armed with digital cameras and sent out to photograph their community. Their images were uploaded to the website, aday.org, as part of an international exhibition of 100,000 images from 165 countries called "A Day in the World."

The power of a strong image

Spear sees the grant funded by the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund as important recognition from his peers. "They consider the publication of this work as important, and that's coming from people in the business – a group of people who believe the process of storytelling through photography is valuable, important."

"What I find absolutely astonishing is the level of photography we continue to see year after year," says Marcel Saba, president of the board of trustees for the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Award. "The quality of the proposals is inspiring and visually expresses the passion, and respect these photographers have for their subjects, and their craft."

Grant recipients (who also included photographers Peter van Agtmael and Massimo Berruti) "exemplify the power of photography and how it can foster change when needed, and build communication bridges between generations of people," he added.

"It seems that each year we are completely overwhelmed with the thoughtfulness, passion, and professionalism we see in the entries we receive and it is we, the judges, who are humbled by the works of these documentary photographers," added juror Lauren Wendle, vice president and publisher of *Photo District News*. "Photojournalism and documentary photography explore the joys and sorrows of everyday life and bring new dimensions to our perspective on life, and our own lives in particular."

Spear concurs. He recalls, vividly, a portrait taken by TERS student Magnus Harlow of his great uncle, revered tribal elder Johnny Arlee, with a large-format camera. "Here was Johnny, and here was his relative, with a camera between them."

"We'd put it (the photograph) up on the bulletin board and people would steal it. That's the power of a strong image. I believe it's the picture people will know Johnny by 100 years from now."

Field guide offers tips for arts educators

It takes a village to provide a well-rounded education to every child. Use Americans for the Arts' new tool, *The Arts Education Field Guide*, to find the connections and partnerships that will strengthen arts education in your community.

Visit the field guide at www.americansforthearts.org/networks/arts_education/002.asp.

Poet Laureate creates poetry podcasts for teachers

by Kristi Niemeyer

"Imagination is probably the most important word for any poet," says Montana Poet Laureate Sheryl Noethe in the introduction to a series of 10 podcasts, developed to inspire teachers and students. "The first job of the poet is to keep their imagination alive and well by using it."

Humanities Montana awarded the Missoula Writing Collaborative \$1,000 to support Noethe's recording of these 15-minute podcasts, focusing on lessons she has taught for the last 30 years. The podcasts are designed to increase the outreach of the poet laureate into many schools and communities that would otherwise be difficult to reach.

Noethe designed the podcasts for educators to use in teaching creative writing, especially poetry. The purpose of the series, she says, "is to inspire teachers and students to develop critical thinking skills and literacy, and to demonstrate the importance of taking part in culture."

"Sheryl is a nationally recognized teacher and poet and we have been honored to play a role in funding her travel around the state.

However, even Sheryl – who has more energy than any 8 year old – couldn't reach every community and school in Montana," says Kim Anderson, associate director of programs at Humanities Montana.

"The podcasts are an excellent example of how technology can help Montanans overcome some of our distance and time obstacles," she adds. "I hope teachers take advantage of this wonderful resource."

Noethe introduces herself in the first podcast and offers an inspirational talk about following one's dreams and working toward success.

The remaining podcasts cover a wide range of humanities disciplines, including literature, history, Native American cultures and traditions, critical thinking and literacy. Topics include:

- Lesson 2, The senses, details and the line break
- Lesson 3, Basic poetry vocabulary
- Lesson 4, "I Remember," an acrostic
- Lesson 5, Ekphrastic poetry (poetry inspired by art)

Continued on next page